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# The Benefits of Social Stories in a Prekindergarten Classroom

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**The Benefits of Social Stories in a Prekindergarten Classroom**

**by**

**Tami Lynne Beaumont**

**May 2008**

**A thesis submitted to the**

**Department of Education and Human Development of the**

**State University of New York College at Brockport**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Science in Education**

# The Benefits of Social Stories in a Prekindergarten Classroom

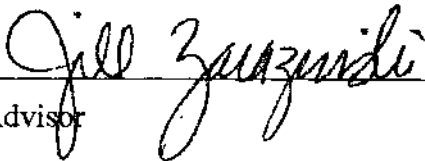
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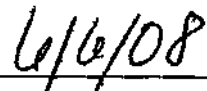
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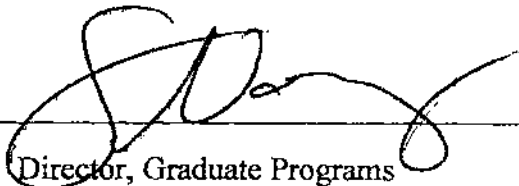
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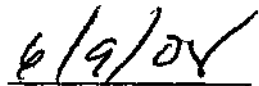
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## Abstract

There is evidence to support the benefits of using social stories for increasing social growth of children with autism. However, there has been little research done on the benefits of using social stories for children with low oral and/or social skills. This research examined the possible benefits of social stories with children in a regular education prekindergarten, Head Start classroom of non-autistic children. A target behavior of hand washing was selected for the seventeen children in the classroom to work on. The classroom teacher created a social story that would tell the children when they should be washing their hands during the school day. The social story was read every morning for three weeks. During the three-week social story intervention the children in the classroom gradually began to wash their hands without being reminded. Many of the children began repeating the story during the second week of intervention and by the third week some of the children were policing each other's behavior at the hand-washing sink.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Social stories were first created to support the social and emotional development of children with autism spectrum disorder. Social stories were designed to teach children with autism how to manage their own behavior during a given social situation. These stories do this by describing where the activity will take place, when it will occur, what will happen, who is participating, and why the child should behave in a given manner (Gray, 1998). Social stories are written and designed to promote positive behavior and social growth for children with autism. With the increase of the use of social stories in special education settings, it would be logical to assume that social stories could also be beneficial for children in regular education classrooms who have limited oral and social skills.

Social stories are becoming more popular as a means of intervention for children with autism. This form of intervention is not just a quick fix. For many children once the intervention/research is discontinued the decline of the target behavior continues. This suggests that the children are learning how to behave in social situations (Ali and Frederickson, 2006). Children who have limited oral or social skills may benefit much in the same way as children with autism.

### *Problem Statement*

Most individuals believe that all students belong in a regular education classroom, and that good teachers are those who can meet the needs of all the students, regardless of what those needs may be. However, there are a growing number of children with behavioral and/or emotional disorders being placed in regular education classrooms. Often teachers are not adequately trained to deal with children who have behavioral

and/or emotional disorders. Teachers may then find themselves dealing with children who have disorders that they then know little about. Classroom teachers are responsible for the education of all the children in their classroom. Having disruptive children in class can hinder some students' ability to learn. A classroom teacher is also responsible for creating a safe environment for children. If a teacher fails to do so, it can create anxiety among other students and disrupt their learning.

The use of social stories in a classroom setting is a less invasive way to help children who have behavioral disorders. A social story can be easily incorporated into the daily routine of a child. Due to this, social story intervention is less disruptive for the child directly working on a social issue. The intervention will also not interrupt the other students during the academic day. If a teacher wishes to have the entire class benefit from social story intervention this could also easily be done. The topic of the social story could be incorporated into the lesson plans of the classroom teacher.

The use of social stories to help reduce a target behavior in a child can save time and money. There are many books and internet sources available to help teachers write their own social stories. Therefore, a teacher could create a social story to target the specific behavior of a child in class. Another benefit to having a teacher develop the social story themselves is that the story can be developed around a child's specific need. Using the child's name and places from their daily environment.

### *Significance of the Problem*

The focus of using a social story is to pin point and help control unwanted behavior of a child. Once a child's unwanted behavior is identified, a classroom teacher can individualize a social story to help that child learn to control their behavior in the



classroom. For example, a teacher is having trouble with a child who lashes out (hits) at their peers when they get angry. The classroom teacher can then create a social story that will target this unwanted behavior (hitting). The teacher can use real life examples from the child's daily environment in the story. This will help the child connect with the social story and help the child know what to do when they get angry. Briody and McGarry (2005) state that social stories can also be valuable tools for helping children who are not diagnosed with any disorders but are lacking social skills or have low oral communication skills. By using real life situations and the child's name in the story it will help the child relate to the situation in the story.

The goal of most social story interventions is to decrease an undesirable behavior. However, there are other benefits to using social stories in a classroom setting. By the time a child enters kindergarten they should know most of the fundamentals of language. Language acquisition is unpredictable and some children develop language skills slower than others. This can cause some children to become withdrawn in class. For children who are having trouble finding the right words in a situation, a social story may be beneficial.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Little research has been conducted on the benefits of using social stories in a regular education classroom. Social stories have primarily been used to teach social skills or manage disruptive behavior for children with autism. Studies have shown that there are benefits to using social stories with autistic children who have limited oral and social skills. By using social stories children learn the correct behaviors to use during social situations. Many children enter school with a lack of oral language and/or social skills.

These children may exhibit behaviors similar to those of children with autism. Children may act out in uncomfortable situations. Some children may even resort to violence if they are unsure of how to handle a given situation. There may be a connection between social stories and the lack of oral language and/or social skills. Social stories could be used to help children who have not been diagnosed with autism.

### *Rationale*

For teachers, the use of social stories is valuable for a variety of reasons. Social stories cost very little to make and are easy to produce. The process of writing a social story is not overly time-consuming, and excellent training materials are now available to assist teachers and others in this regard (Gray, 2000). There is also a growing amount of evidence that supports the use of social stories across settings and as interventions to deal with a variety of problem behaviors.

Social stories are designed to help build a child's ability to think in ways necessary for appropriate social interaction with others. Social stories also present information on social situations in a structured and consistent manner. This can be beneficial especially when dealing with skills and behaviors, which are as fluid as those involved in social interactions. Social stories also give children direct contact with social information, contact through pictures and text. Finally, social stories provide a little distance between teaching and the possible stresses of the social situation itself; they give the child a chance to practice the skills often and on his terms (Carter and Reynhout, 2006).

### *Definition of Terms*

The research that Owens (2005) has done on oral language has assisted me in defining oral language for this research study. Oral communication describes any type of interaction that makes use of spoken words. Oral skills are a vital and integral part of life. Limited oral skills are the lack of or inability to use spoken word. Owens has also looked at the development of social skills in young children. Social skills are those that include daily interaction skills such as sharing, taking turns, and allowing others to talk without interrupting. Self-control, like appropriate anger management is an example of a social skill.

Gray (2000) developed the idea of using social stories for children with autism. Her book *The New Social Story Book*, published in 2000 helped define social stories. Social stories are tools for teaching social skills to children. Social stories provide an individual with accurate information about situations that they may find difficult or confusing. The situation is described in detail and focus is given to a few key points: the important social cues, the events and reactions the individual might expect to occur in the situation, the actions and reactions that might be expected of him, and why.

### *Summary*

There are a growing number of children being diagnosed with behavioral disorders and being placed in regular education classrooms. With this increase, classroom teachers have been put in situations which require them to face problems that they are not always equip to handle. This can cause disruptions for both the classroom teacher and the other children in the class. The use of social stories in a classroom setting may be an effective way to help target and decrease behavioral disruptions during class.

By the time most children enter kindergarten they should be able to communicate and interact with other members of their class. Given that not all young children develop the ability to communicate at the same rate social stories could be beneficial for classroom teachers. Social stories can be incorporated into the classroom routine. They can be designed for a specific child or designed as a reminder of the correct behavior during a social situation for the class.

This study examines the effect of social stories in a three year-old classroom. A social story was created that models for the class when to wash their hands during the day. Will the addition of a social story increase the number of times the children remember to wash their hands during the day without being reminded by the teachers? Prior to the integration of the social story I kept track of the children's hand washing routines for three weeks. The study was conducted over a six-week period. Data was collected using a daily hand washing checklist.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

In researching social stories and their use in the classroom three main topics emerged: social stories used with autistic children, language and social skill development in young children, and social story use for regular education preschool children. These three themes guided the research for this study

### *Social Stories and Children With Autism*

In the past social stories have mostly been used for children who have autism. The use of social story intervention has shown to be a valuable tool in targeting and decreasing disruptive behavior. Disruptive behavior can interfere with the education of both the disrupter and the other children in the class. Scattone, Wilczynski, Edwards, Rabian (2002) state that, "Social stories may draw on a unique quality that children with autism have. Children with autism often rigidly adhere to routines, the social story may serve to establish a routine or rule that the child may then apply to the social situation" (p.535). While social stories draw on the strength of routine the format of social stories may also be less intrusive than alternative treatments for addressing the lack of social skills in children with autism. Social stories present the information in a written format as opposed to verbal commands. This allows the child to receive rules in a manner that will maximize the likelihood that they will benefit from the information.

In their 2002 study, Scattone, et al. examined the disruptive behavior of Kenny, a seven year-old-male diagnosed with autism. Kenny was able to talk in complete sentences, and was able to read. His target (disruptive) behavior was tipping his chair backward or sideways which often caused him to fall on the floor in the middle of class. A social story was designed to target this behavior and gave examples of appropriate

ways to sit in a chair in class. The classroom teacher introduced and read the social story to Kenny. After the initial introduction of the social story Kenny was then expected to read his social story once each morning to the teacher. After a nine week social story intervention Kenny was able to reduce the number of times he tipped in his chair during class by 70%. Kenny who enjoyed reading would sometimes be found reciting or rereading his social story during class. Scattone, et al. (2002) also noted that during the study Kenny would recite his social story to other children in the class who were tipping their chairs.

In their study Scattone, et al. (2002) also examined the disruptive behavior of Howard, a seven year-old male who was diagnosed with a mild form of autism. Howard was also a member of the same classroom as Kenny. Howard's target (disruptive) behavior was that he would often shout out during math class. This disrupted lessons and caused other children to shout out during class as well. Unlike Kenny, Howard was not yet able to read independently. Therefore, his teacher read his social story to him each morning. Howard's social story was made accessible to him throughout the day. His classroom teacher left the story on the blackboard in the front of the room. The authors (2002) noted that during the social story intervention Howard did not access his social story during the school day. After a nine week social story intervention the number of times Howard shouted out during math class greatly decreased.

In a study conducted by Kuoch and Mirenda (2003) a five year-old-male's eating habits were examined. Henry was diagnosed with autism when he was two years-old. The authors (2003) noted that prior to this research study social stories had been used in the past with Henry. Prior social story intervention had worked well with Henry. During this

study Henry was attending a summer camp program and having trouble during meal time. Henry would often make sounds such as screaming, squealing, or crying. Henry would also throw up food and put his hands inside his pants on his genital area (Kuoch and Mirenda 2003). Henry's social story was read twice a day to the entire summer camp class of thirty children. The story was read once before lunch and then again before snack time. Henry's social story addressed appropriate meal time behaviors. Henry's camp councilors used the social story as a tool to work on the correct behavior during meal time for all his classmates

Kuoch and Mirenda (2003) noted that when Henry's social story was introduced there was an immediate decrease in his target behavior. It was also noted that when the social story intervention was discontinued treatment reversal did not occur. During their research the authors did not examine the effects that Henry's peers may have had on the reduction of his disruptive behavior. However, it was noted that a change of behavior at meal time could be seen in Henry's peers.

In some cases of autism the target behavior can hinder the advancement of a child. Agosta, Graetz, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2004) discovered this to be true while conducting their research on a young girl diagnosed with autism. The authors focused on a young girl in a special education class whose target behaviors consisted of loud screaming, yelling, humming, and other distracting noises during class activities in a special education setting. These disruptive behaviors were a serious concern to her classroom teacher. The young girl's target behaviors also hampered the teacher's efforts to place her in a more inclusive environment.

To conduct their research study the authors used an ABA format. Three different social stories were created specifically to address the young girls target behaviors. Each social story was introduced one at a time during the classes circle time. Over a four-week period (A) the authors noticed a decline in the young girls target behaviors. The most significant decreases were in the yelling and humming during class time. The social story was then withdrawn (B) from circle time. During this four-week period the young girl showed little regression in her target behaviors. The authors noted that the young girl's behaviors did not improve any during this time. The classroom teacher was then instructed by the authors on how to continue to use the social stories with the young girl (A). During this four-week time period the classroom teacher could see a continued decline in the young girl's behavior. With this continued decline of the young girls target behaviors the classroom teacher would be able to reexamine a new placement in a more inclusive classroom setting.

In recent years schools have had been able to bring more technology into the classroom. The use of computers and video cameras can also be beneficial when combined with social stories. The benefit of technology can be seen in a study by Hagiwara and Myles (1999). The authors conducted a study using two children who were having trouble remembering to wash their hands and washing them the right way. For their study the authors created a social story on a computer. The children worked with their classroom teacher during the introduction of the social story. Their teacher instructed the two children on how to use the computer to access their social stories. For the first-week of social story intervention the classroom teacher read the social story to the two children each morning. When the children were able to use the computer on their



own the teacher was then able to leave the area. During the intervention both children showed an improvement in remembering to wash their hands. When the social story intervention was withdrawn both children showed little regression in remembering to wash their hands. The classroom teacher noted another benefit to having a social story on the computer was that both children were more familiar with how to use the computer.

In their study, Thiemann and Goldstein (2001) were able to show that combining social stories with peer social interaction and the use of video cameras was effective in increasing communication skills in five students with autism. They used five elementary students who had social impairments and had been diagnosed with autism. Each one of the five children was paired with two other students without disabilities from their grade. Each team of three children met at separate times during the day for a thirty minute session twice a week. Each session consisted of a social story intervention, role playing, and self-evaluation. During the reading of the social story and the role playing the children were video taped. Once they completed their role playing the children watched the video tape and were asked to evaluate their handling of the situation.

Thiemann and Goldstein stated in their research that, “ Students with autism demonstrate a restricted range of social communication skills such a limited speech to initiate comments, request information from others, listen and respond to others, and interact in simple games”(p. 425). The authors used the children’s peers to model the correct behaviors. By combining peers, the social story, and the video tape assessment the authors were able to improve the topic maintenance skills for all the students participating. The authors addressed the benefits of having peers involved in the study.

The children with autism were able to interact and model behaviors that were demonstrated by their peers.

In a similar research study Kamps, Leonard, Vernon, Dugan, and Delquadri (1992) look at the effects of using a social story in an integrated classroom setting. The author's research study was incorporated into the schools first grade curriculum. The author's were looking at the effects of social skills training for the whole class not just the children who had been labeled with autism. In the class of twenty-two children three boys were labeled with autism. Each of the three boys was considered to be high functioning in intellectual capabilities, language skills, and academic performance. However, the boys were lacking in social skills. After a two-week observation the authors selected six social skills for the class to work on. For the research study prewritten texts were selected for the six social skills selected. Social stories were not written for any of the social skills. Each skill was worked on for two to three weeks in small groups of about seven children per group. The classroom teacher would read the social story to the small group and then conduct a group discussion on the topic. The children were asked to share how they would handle the social situation being discussed. Kamps, et al (1992) found that there were improved social performances for target students and their peers. The authors also noted positive changes in social interactions among students and social skill behaviors.

Current research conducted using social story intervention deals with children who have been diagnosed with mild autism. For their research Barry and Burlew (2004) looked at the effect that a social story interventions would have on two male children diagnosed with severe autism. The authors selected two subjects from an Exceptional Student Education classroom consisting of twelve children who had special needs. The

two male children that were selected had trouble making appropriate activity choices, playing appropriately with chosen activities, and playing appropriately with their peers. In some instances the two boys would lash out at their peers when they got angry. The authors wrote three separate social stories that addressed each of these situations. The stories were introduced one at a time in a one-to-one interaction between a child and the teacher. Each morning the classroom teacher would read a social story to one child then the other. Each story was read for two-weeks before the next one was introduced. The classroom teacher started with how to choose an appropriate activity then, how to use materials appropriately, and finally how to appropriately interact with their peers appropriately. During the first two-weeks of the social story intervention very little change in the children's behavior was noticed. By the sixth week of intervention a significant decline in the target behaviors was noticed. The most significant was that of the lashing out at peers when the two boys got angry.

### *Language and Social Skill Development*

The acquisition of oral language in young children is not predictable. Children develop language skills at different rates. Genishi and Dyson (2005) found that children generally say their first words between 12 and 18 months of age. Most children begin to use complex sentences by the age of 4 to 4 ½ years. By the time children start kindergarten, they know most of the fundamentals of language. Due to the fact that the acquisition of oral language is unpredictable some children enter kindergarten with a lack of skills needed to function in a regular classroom setting. At times this can cause children to act out or act inappropriately in social situations with their peers.

Children need to learn how to speak, but seem to be born with an ability to interact socially. Genishi and Dyson (2005) point out that even before children use words, they use cries and gestures to convey meaning. Often young children are able to understand the meanings others are trying to convey as well. The point of learning language and interacting socially then, is not to master rules but to make connections with other people and to make sense of experiences. This can be more difficult for children who are not developing language skills at the same rate as their peers. The inability to interact socially with their peers could cause children to withdraw and leave empty handed from a situation involving interactions with their peers.

As young as two years of age children begin to develop a theory of mind. Theory of mind is a child/adults ability to identify a person's mental state. This is a key part of a child's cognitive development. In their study, Gregory, Lough, and Stone (2002) point out that social cognition is the ability to assume other people's mental states, thoughts and feelings. The ability of normal children/adults to characterize mental states to themselves and others in order to explain and predict behaviors helps in social situations. Autism is a biologically based disorder that appears to impair theory of mind in children diagnosed with the disorder. Baron-Cohen, Ring, Wheelwright, Bullmore, Brammer, Simmons, and Williams (1999) found that children with autism lack a theory of mind. This makes it difficult for children with autism to know how to act in social situations. Young children whose cognitive abilities do not develop at the same rate as other may have a similar problem in social situations. If their language skills are not well developed either this could cause a child to become frustrated and act out.

It is critically important that educators identify children who may be at risk for disruptive behaviors. If these children are recognized at an early age teachers can then guide them to learn social and emotional skills. Fox and Lentini (2006) believe that teachers should use child-centered, developmentally appropriate activities when working with children displaying disruptive behaviors. The authors go on to state that, "It is important to design a systematic teaching approach that allows such children to acquire and use their new social skills easily, over time, and in a variety of situations" (p.47). The use of social stories in the classroom is one way that this can be achieved. Introducing social stories allows a teacher to provide the whole class with correct ways to interact with their peers. Social stories also allow a teacher to cover topics that address issues in class. Social stories can also be integrates in to the classroom without alienating students and making them feel worse.

Social stories promote positive behaviors and encourage healthy emotional growth in children. Stories can be developed to help support children with transitions and managing their own behavior. Reynhout and Carter (2006) support the use of social stories for young children. Due to the fact, that social stories are clear and to the point they can be used to support young children who are not diagnosed with a disability. Social stories describe a typical situation in which the child may experience a problem. The story will then include a clear description of what should happen in the classroom and acknowledge the problems in a matter of fact way. This type of story can be used for children at any age. Social stories are generally short and personalized to allow the reader to connect to the story. Stories are usually written by teachers, speech therapists and

parents, they are designed with the child's specific needs in mind. This also allows the writer to use real life situations and familiar names in a child's social story.

In Owens (2005) book, *Language Development: An Introduction* published in 2005, he discusses the development of language for children birth through five years of age. He describes the narrative level of language development in young children. Narrative language consists of children using two strategies for organization information; centering and chaining. Centering enables a child to link entities to form a story nucleus. Chaining is when a sequence of events share attributes that lead directly from one to another (2005). The development of narrative language in young children helps support the use of social stories in the classroom. The premise of a social story is to design them around the child who is exhibiting disruptive behaviors. Using the narrative process a child is able to connect their behavior to that of the behavior displayed in the social story. This helps the child develop the language and social skills they are lacking.

Bertram (2002) explains that children learn through listening and speaking. The author goes on to state, "Being able to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings, and being able to respond to the communications of others, enables students to participate in society successfully" (p.45) Therefore, effective oral language and social skills are developed through practice and training. This means that teachers should not just teach children how to speak. Teachers should be providing children with the words and skills to help them communicate more effectively. Introducing social stories to a classroom is an easy way to give children the opportunity to practice and the training that they may need to develop oral language and social skills. Social stories are also inexpensive and take little time for teachers to make.

In their research Kemple and Hartle (1997) found peer relationships to be important for young children's oral language and social development. The authors found that teachers can influence a child's development of social competence in a variety of ways. Teachers can effectively use planned activities and on-the-spot guidance to help children learn to interact appropriately with their peers. The authors found it beneficial for the classroom teacher to model appropriate behaviors and use pre-written social stories. This way the classroom teacher was able to address target behaviors that developed with the whole class. The teacher was able to address yelling and hitting through the introduction of social stories. Some of the stories lead way to role playing. The children enjoyed role playing during class. This allowed them to express their thoughts and give different solutions for solving social issues that were relevant to them. The classroom teacher acknowledged each child's contribution to the role playing discussions.

The ability of young children to manage their emotions and behaviors and to make meaningful friendships is an important prerequisite for school readiness and academic success. Socially competent children are also more academically successful. Poor social skills are a strong predictor of academic failure. Young children are not born with the knowledge of how to act in social situations. Children obtain social skills through participating in social situations with their peers. Most often these skills are learned in a school setting. Learning social skills helps children develop independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and cooperation. Choi and Kim (2003) refer to the importance of acquiring social skills. Peer acceptance during early childhood is related to children's academic achievement, adjustment in school, and even psychological well-

being in adulthood. As a way of helping children with a lack of social skills Choi and Kim (2003) designed a cognitive-social learning model of social skills. The model focuses on cognitive changes as well as behavioral changes. There are three parts of the social skills model-enhancing skill concepts, promoting skill performance, and fostering skill maintenance/generalization. The authors' social skills model focused on giving children examples of the proper behaviors in social situations. The children were also given an opportunity to practice the newly acquired skills with their peers. The author's also discussed the importance of positive parse for the children participating in the study. Children who were given parse often continued to grow and showed little regression in social skills during the study.

Insufficient communication skills have also been associated with poor social skills. Spence (2003) pointed out that social skills include a range of verbal and non-verbal responses that directly influence the perception and response of other people during social interactions. In her study, Spence (2003) discussed micro-levels of verbal communication. Micro-levels such as tone of voice, volume, rate and clarity of speech influence the impressions people make about others. These micro-levels can also affect others reactions to us during social interactions. A lack in social perception skills and social knowledge may result in a child's inaccurate interpretation of a social cues and then lead to an inappropriate social responding. An inappropriate response could lead to an outburst from a child especially if that child is placed in an uncomfortable situation.

Many children have very little idea how to interact appropriately with their classmates. Some children are lacking the social skills needed to perform the most basic cooperative tasks. Spence (2003) has designed a social skills training model to teach a



range of fundamental social skills and strategies to deal with commonly presenting social situations. The author's model consists of five steps. The first step in the model is behavioral social skills training. This step consists of group discussion, modeling of behaviors, role playing by students, feedback from both peers and the classroom teacher, and reinforcement. The next step is social perception skills training. During this step children are taught how to correctly interpret social cues from others and from social context. The third step is self-instructional and self regulation. This step consists of learning self monitoring techniques and self reinforcement. The fourth step is social problem solving. This step will teach children how to identify problems, generate alternative solutions, predict consequences, and select and plan appropriate responses. The final step is the reduction of inappropriate social responses. During this final step children will learn relaxation techniques and cognitive restructuring. The author suggests that teachers take eight to twelve weeks to introduce the social skills model to their class. Children should be sufficient in each of the steps before the classroom teacher moves on. Spence (2003) has also found that it is important to continue on going maintenance training with the social skills training. Without ongoing maintenance many children show a regression in their social skills.

### *Social Stories in Preschool Classrooms*

While doing research in a regular education preschool classroom of 23 children Ali and Frederickson (2006) found that social stories worked wonderfully for children who were having trouble understanding social situations. Some of the children in class were having trouble managing and coping with changes in their daily routine. By using social stories that were tailored to the specific needs of each child the authors were able

to help children cope with changes to their day to day schedules. Ali and Frederickson (2006) found that social stories work best when they are individualized for each student. Some children's range of interest is often narrow and rigidly defined. Therefore, the authors created social stories for each of the children who were having trouble with the changes to their daily schedules. Children that had stories created for them were introduced to them in a one-to-one setting. The teacher would read the child the story each morning for a week. After a week the children were expected to read the story to without the teacher. The social stories offered children visual information both in written and/or picture about real life social situations. This was beneficial for the children who were having trouble developing language skills at the same rate as the rest of their classmates.

Social stories can also be effective for young children who have limited oral and/or social skills. Briody and McGarry (2005) found that social stories can be beneficial in assisting young children in memory development and self-regulation. Social stories can also help children organize and interpret daily events. This will help develop a daily routine and provide less confusion for a young child. Briody and McGarry (2005) give an example of a two-year undiagnosed boy. The first boys name was Patrick he was having trouble separating from his parents during drop off time at his pre-school. Patrick would often scream and cry when his dad tried to leave for work. Patrick's actions were upsetting for both him and father. Patrick's caregivers suggested that they established a drop off routine with his parents and create a social story to assist with Patrick's drop off.

Patrick's parents were enlisted to help with his social story. To create the social story pictures were taken of him leaving his house, getting in the car, entering daycare,

entering the classroom, and so on. Patrick was introduced to his social story and it was read to him every morning during drop off time. The authors noticed a change in Patrick's behavior soon after the social story intervention began. Separation from his parent's during morning drop off became less stressful for Patrick. Patrick also had access to his social story and was able to have it whenever he wanted. This allowed Patrick to review his social story at any time of the day. Briody and McGarry (2005) found that the social story helped Patrick to anticipate what would happen next and helped reduce his anxiety during his early verbal developmental years.

The authors also give an example of using a social story to help a four year-old boy named Luke. Luke was having a similar problem to Patrick's. Luke would separate from his father with no trouble but did not know what to do after that. The classroom teacher would have activities set up for the children in the morning. However, Luke was often found standing in the doorway with a look of confusion on his face. Luke was unsure of what to do when he got to school. His primary care giver created a social story using pictures of Luke doing different morning activities around the classroom. Luke's classroom teacher read the social story to him every morning during drop off time. Sometimes Luke would ask his father to read the story to him. Shortly after Luke was introduced to his social story the classroom teachers could see a change in his behavior. Much like Patrick, Luke was able to easily access his social story and would often carry it with him during class.

In researching social stories there was limited research that was done on social stories in a regular education classroom. However, the benefits of using social stories for children with autism were clear. Children with autism tend to have low oral and social

skills. The connection between social story use in classrooms of children with limited oral and social skills may exist and is what this research attempts to identify.

### Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluation

#### *Introduction*

The target group for this research was a three-year old Head Start pre-kindergarten class. The Head Start program ran for half a day, Monday through Thursday. The hours were from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The goal of the research was to reduce the number of times during the school day that the classroom teacher needed to remind the children to wash their hands.

#### *Participants*

The target group that was researched was located at a day care center in Western New York. The center runs a Head Start program. The target group was selected from this Head Start program. Head Start is a federally funded child development program for low-income families. The goal of the program is to help prepare children for a successful transition to kindergarten. The program is free for low-income families and therefore receives assistance from the Department of Social Services. Each of these families also receives food stamps and about half receive service from the Women, Infant, and Child program (W.I.C.). Half of the families receive housing assistance to help pay for rent and/or household needs (gas, electric, and water bills).

Nine of the children enrolled in the target class are African American; one child is Hispanic; two children are Caucasian and four of the children are bi-racial. At the beginning of the research study there were sixteen children enrolled in the pre-kindergarten class. Six of the children were four years of age while the remaining ten children were three years of age. Ten of the children were girls and six were boys. One boy in the classroom was unlabeled but received speech services. During the school week

he received one forty-five minute speech session. His speech teacher generally conducts push-in services. The boy is developmentally behind the other children in the classroom. His mental abilities are that of a two-year old. One other child in the class receives speech services. This girl receives speech twice each week for thirty-minute sessions. Her speech teacher does both push-in and pull-out sessions. The remaining fourteen children have the mental capacity of three and four-year olds.

There was one full-time teacher in the classroom and two full-time teacher assistants. The full-time teacher's (known as the lead or first teacher) highest completed level of education at the time was a Bachelors degree in Elementary Education Kindergarten through sixth grade. The first teacher assistant (next in charge in the classroom) had recently completed her Child Development Associates (CDA) program. The second teacher assistant had completed high school. The three teachers in the classroom had not had any previous experience using or creating social stories.

### *Procedures of Study*

To begin the research I conducted a three-week observation noting how often the children washed their hands without being reminded by the classroom teachers. A checklist (see Appendix A) was used to keep track of these observations. While conducting the three-week observation, a social story was created that helped remind children of appropriate times to wash their hands. How to correctly wash their hands was not addressed in the social story due to the fact that it had already been addressed with the children earlier in the school year. There was also a poster next to the sink that showed the children how to correctly wash their hands.

Once the initial observation was complete the social story (see Appendix B) was introduced to the class. The social story was read to the children every day for three weeks. It was read during morning greeting time that occurs directly before breakfast. I continued to keep track of the children's hand washing routines using the checklist during the three weeks of social story intervention.

### *Instruments of Study*

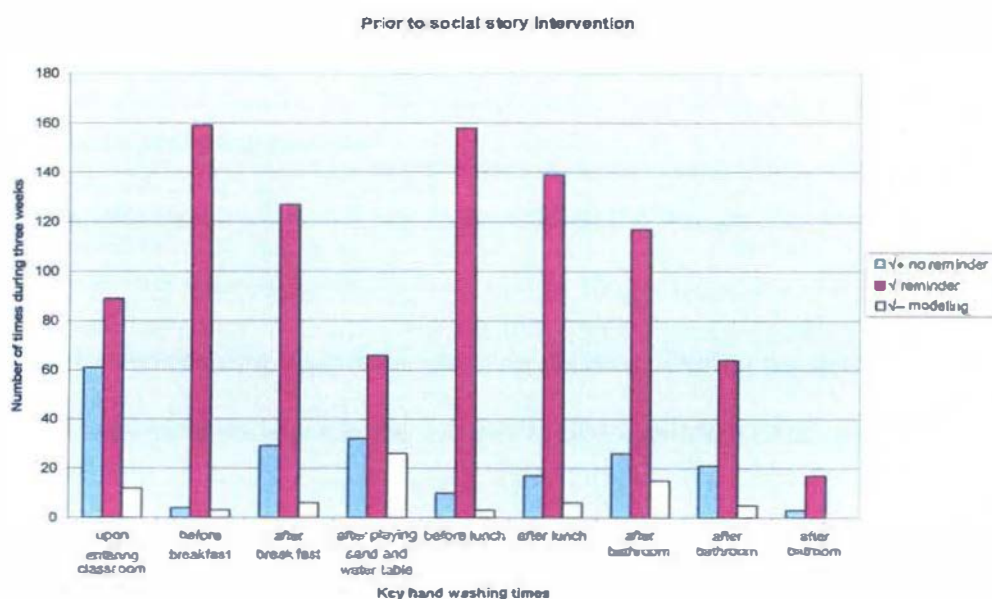
The first tool used during the research study was the hand washing checklist (see Appendix A). The checklist observed key moments during the day: upon entering the classroom, before and after meals, after playing in the sand or water table and after going to the bathroom. If a child washed their hands without being reminded by a teacher that child received a  $\sqrt{+}$ . If the child needed reminding to wash their hands the child received a  $\sqrt{}$ . If a child needed hand-over-hand modeling to wash their hands the child received a  $\sqrt{-}$ .

During the research study a social story that was created for the children in the class was used (see Appendix B). The story covered the key moments during the school day when the children should be washing their hands. The main character in the social story was a girl named A'Lexus. The name A'Lexus was selected because it was the name of a girl in the class from the previous year. A'Lexus often visited the class and all the children knew who she was and enjoyed when she visited. I wanted to use a name that would be recognizable to the children in the class. I wanted the children to make a real life connection with the main character in the story.

## Chapter Four: Results

*Three-week Observation*

During the initial three-week observation a hand washing checklist (see Appendix A) was used to keep track of how often the children remembered to wash their hands. According to the information gathered during this time the classroom teachers often had to remind students to wash their hands after key moments in the day.



*Figure 1.* Prior to social story intervention

The most significant times during the day that children need to be reminded were during meal times and after using the bathroom. It became time consuming for the teachers to constantly have to remind students to wash their hands.

After the lead teacher conducted morning greeting time with the children they were dismissed one at a time for breakfast. Before each child left the circle the lead teacher would remind the children to wash their hands. This did not always guarantee that the children would in fact wash their hands. Some children would just go sit down at the



table or wander around the sink area. This caused the second or third teacher in the room to have to remind the student to wash their hands. Sometimes they would have to do hand-over-hand modeling for the children.

During the initial three-week observation I noticed that for many of the children it did not matter how messy their hands were after meal time they still needed to be reminded to wash their hands. Also, not all the children liked to play in the sand and/or water table. For the children who did play in this area it did not matter how messy their hands were they too needed to be reminded to wash their hands.

### *Three-week Social Story Intervention*

During the three-week social story intervention the lead teacher read the social story each day during morning greeting time. She no longer asked the children to wash their hands before dismissing them from morning greeting. During the first-week of the intervention there was an increase in the number of times children remembered to wash their hands.

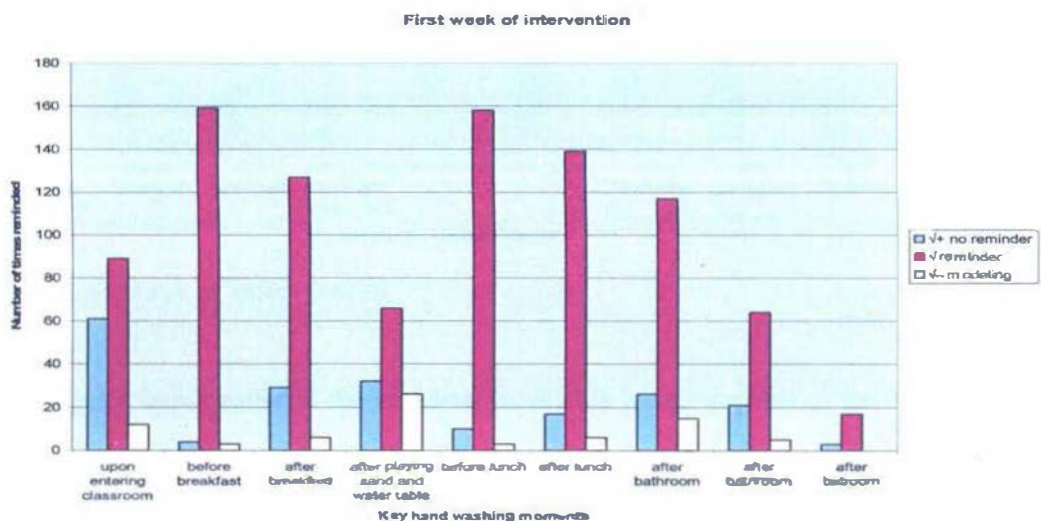
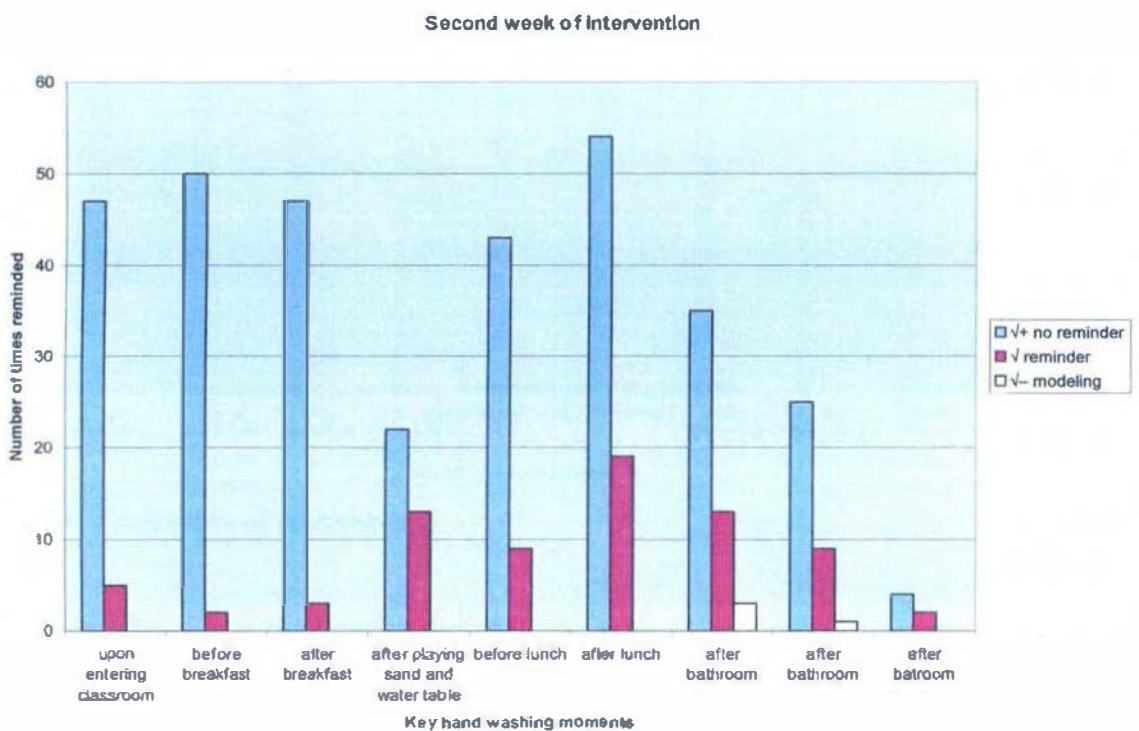


Figure 2. First week of intervention

The most significant increase was before and after breakfast and after going to the bathroom. By the end of the first week of the social story intervention the children in the class came to expect the social story to be read to them. They would ask the lead teacher if it was time for the germ story.

During the second week of the social story intervention there was a larger decrease in the number of times the teachers needed to remind children to wash their hands.



*Figure 3.* Second week of intervention

During this week some of the children were able to recite parts of the story. In a sense they were reading along with the lead teacher. At this point I noticed that the boy in the class who was unlabeled but developmentally behind mimicking other children at the sink. He would see the other children by the sink waiting and talking and he would go

over to be with them. He would watch a few of the children wash their hands and then he would wash his.

During the third-week of the social story intervention is when there is a significant increase in the number of children washing their hands without being reminded.

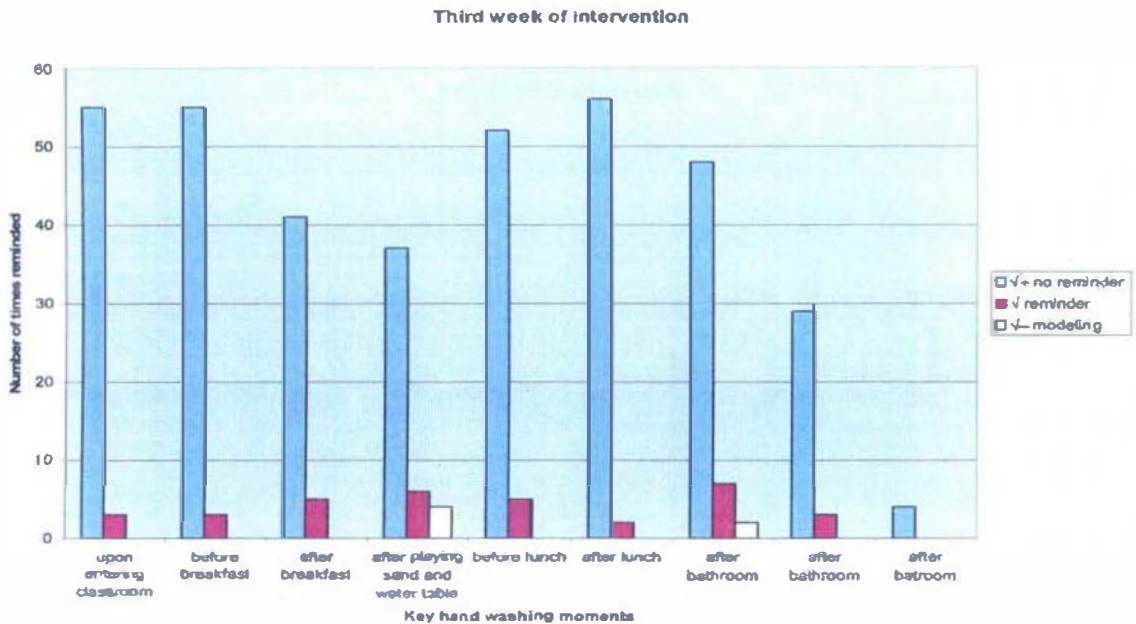


Figure 4. Third week of intervention

At this point in the intervention children in the class started correcting one another's behavior. If a child noticed that a friend forgot to wash their hands they would remind the child. The children continued to expect and enjoy reading the social story. A majority of the children were able to retell the story by looking at the pictures.

#### *Post Social Story Intervention*

After completing the three-week social story intervention the lead teacher stopped reading the social story during morning greeting. The social story was placed on the classroom bookshelf. The children were instructed that if they chose to they could read

the book. At first the children were disappointed at not hearing the story anymore. There were a few children who did select the social story during choice time or quiet reading time. Once during choice time the lead teacher noticed one child reading the social story to three other children.

After removing the social story from morning greeting there did not appear to be a regression in hand washing.

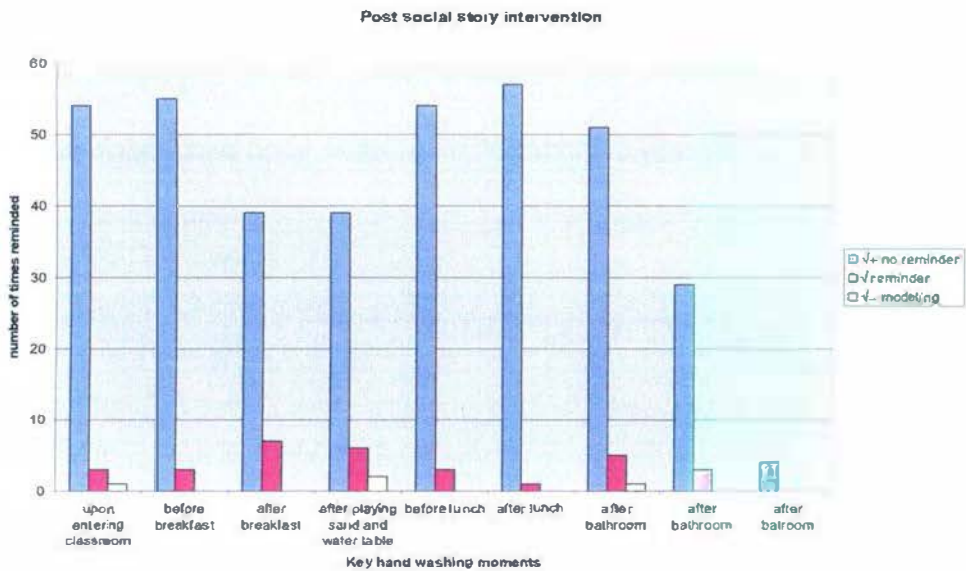


Figure 5. Post social story intervention

The children retained the information obtained during the social story intervention. There were also children that continued to remind their classmates to wash their hands.

### Summary

During the three-week social story intervention the class enjoyed listening to the social story. Children often read along with the teacher during circle time. As shown by the data collected, the children's behavior gradually began to change during the first week of intervention. By the end of the three-week social story intervention children in

the class began to police themselves at the sink. Some children would remind their friends to wash the germs off their hands. After the removal of the social story from morning circle there was little regression in the children's hand washing behavior. Children could still be seen reminding their classmates to wash their hands if they forgot. The social story was placed in the classroom library once the three-week intervention had been completed. Children had full access to the social story. Many of the children would take advantage of this and select the story to read. A few of the children even read the book to a friend during quiet book time. The social story intervention benefited the children in the class. Their hand washing skills greatly improved.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Discussion*

While conducting my research I found few studies that used social stories for children who did not have autism. The concept of a social story intervention seemed like it might work for children with low oral language and/or social skills. The young children in the class seemed to embrace and enjoy the social story. Overall the need for reminding the students to wash their hands declined. All of the participants showed an instant response to the use of the social story. During and after the three-week intervention there were very few incidents of regression by the students.

Over the three-week social story intervention there was a decline in the number of times classroom teachers needed to remind children to wash their hands. This enabled the classroom teachers to spend less time at the sink monitoring the children. At one point the children were able to monitor one another. With less time spent at the sink area classroom teachers could work with children on other skill they may need help with.

Based on the results from this study, social stories could be used for children in my classroom who do not have autism. The results from this study seem to be similar to those in studies conducted with autistic children. The children responded to and at one point were able to recite the story. Once the social story was removed children were able to continue to wash their hands with little to no reminders. This pattern of behavior mimicked that of the studies done with autistic children.

### *Action Plan*

The outcome of this study proved to be beneficial to the children in the classroom. I brought up the results of my research project to my colleagues during a staff meeting.

There are two other three year-old teachers that I meet with once a month. After our discussion I learned that they both are having similar problems with hand washing. Both teachers informed me that sometimes they fight with children when it comes time to wash their hands. My two colleagues have inquired about implementing the social story intervention in their classrooms. One of the teachers would also like to address the fighting that has been taking place in her classroom by using a social story.

After a discussion with the education coordinator about the concerns addressed by my colleagues she was interested in the process of writing social stories. Together we created a training proposal and submitted it to the director of the center. We have already begun compiling information for the training. The education coordinator would like the training to teach staff how to create their own inexpensive social stories. There are a number of children enrolled at the center who have behavioral disorders. The education coordinator hopes that through social stories behaviors of children in pre-kindergarten will improve.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Based on the results from this research project I would like to repeat this study using a different topic. While conducting the research for hand washing behavior I noted that the majority of the children did not know how to line up correctly when it was time to exit the classroom. This became a problem especially during fire drills. I would create a social story to address the correct way to line up when leaving the classroom.

### *Conclusion*

Based on the outcome of this research study I would use social stories in a regular education classroom to help control behavioral problems. The social story was

inexpensive and did not require much time to create. I was able to work the social story into the curriculum already in place. The children grew to expect the story read each day. The children were unaware of the true purpose of the social story.

The main goal of the study was to have the children remember to wash their hands during key moments in the day. In three-weeks most of the children were able to do so. Hand washing became second nature to some children. They would even correct one another's behavior. It was as if some children were policing the area and their classmates' behavior.



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# Hand Washing Checklist

### Times of day when the children should be washing their hands

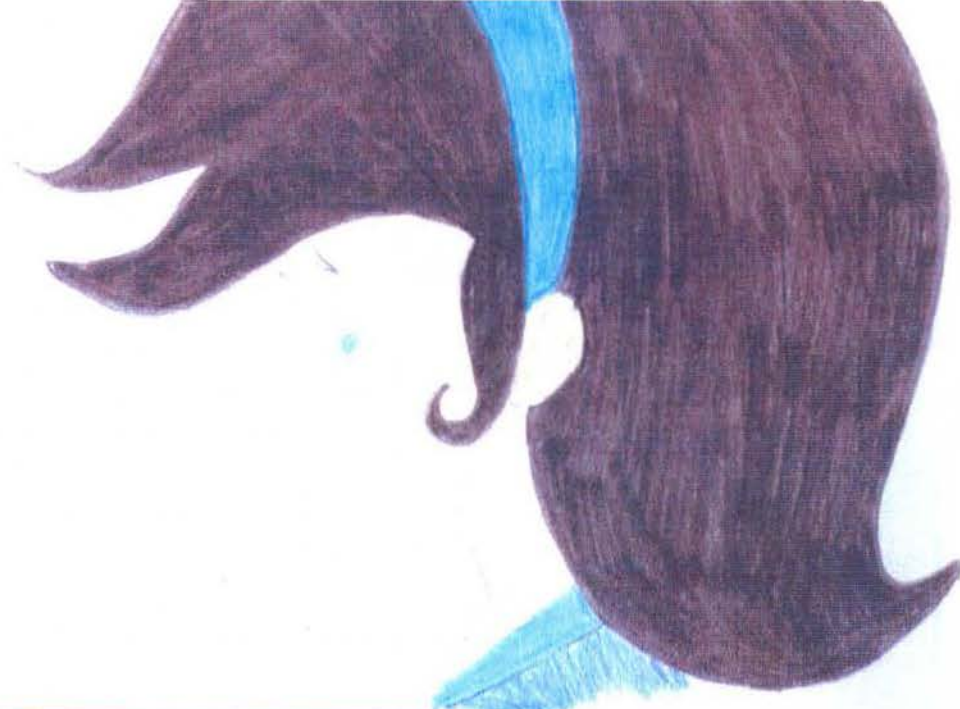
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✓- = child needed hand over hand modeling to wash their hands.

# A'Lexus washes her hands

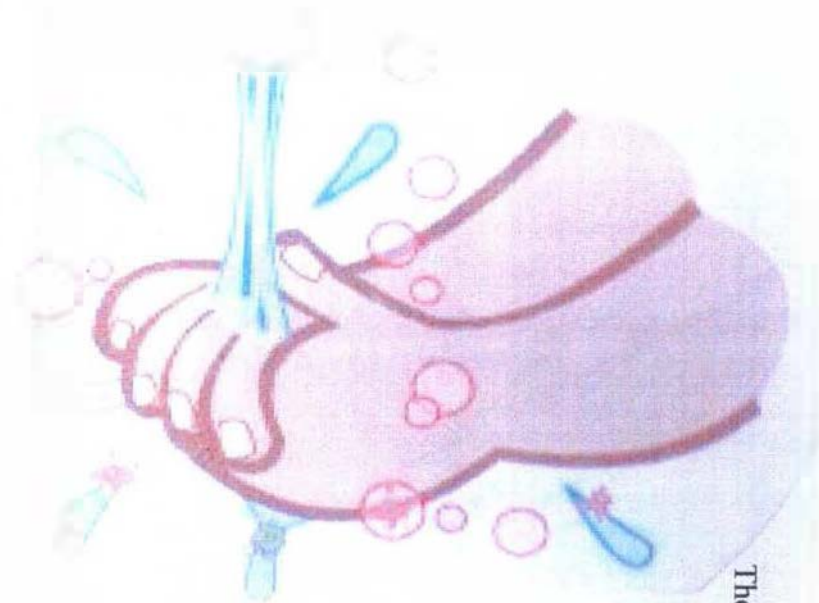


By Ms. Tami



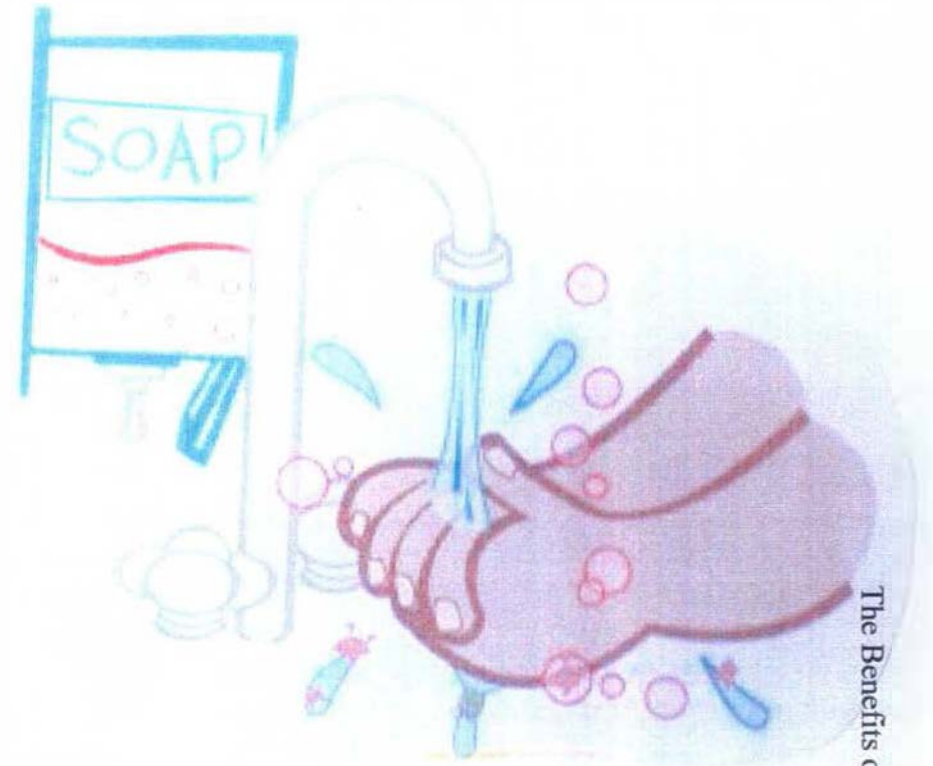
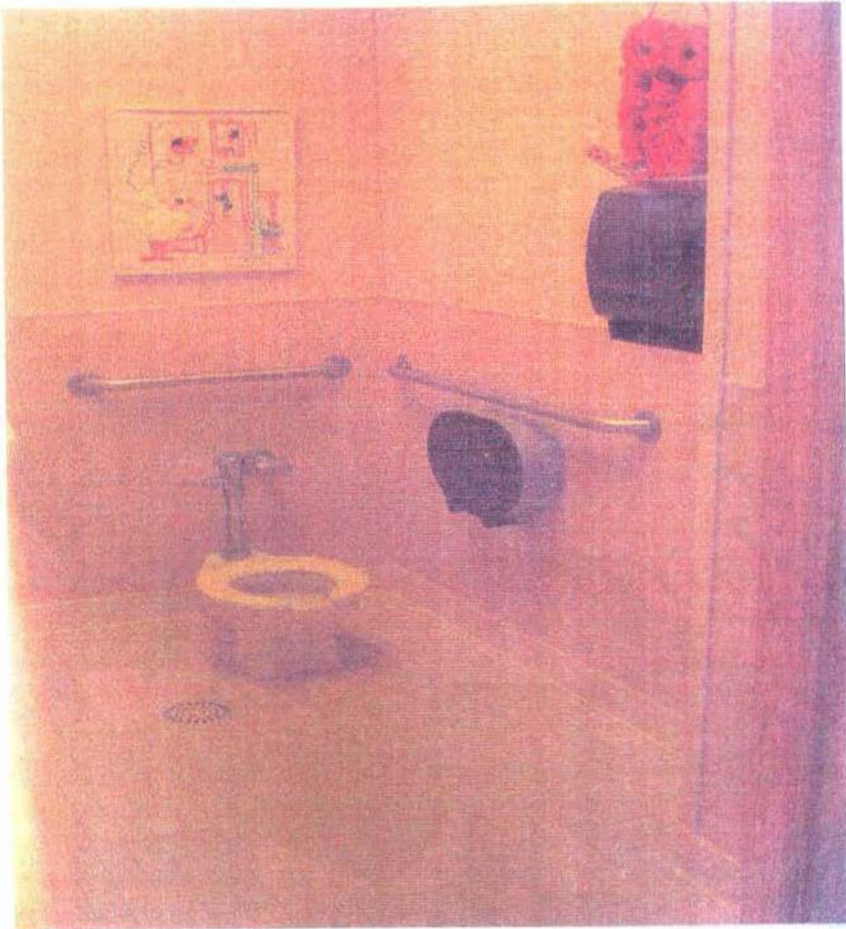
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Hi, my name is A'Lexus. This is my classroom and that in my teacher.



When I come in the classroom my teacher asks me to wash my hands. She told me that sometimes my hands have germs on them. Germs can make me sick. It is important to wash my hands to keep me healthy.





Sometimes, my hands get germs on them when I use the bathroom. It makes my teacher happy when I remember to wash my hands after I use the bathroom.





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It is also a good idea to wash my hands before I eat. I do not want to get germs on my food. Germs can make me sick. I wash my hands before I eat breakfast and lunch.



When I eat sometimes, I get messy. It makes my teacher happy when I remember to wash my hands after I eat.





Sometimes, my hands get dirty while I play. It keeps me healthy to wash my hands when they are dirty.





When I play in the sand and water table my hands get dirty. My teacher reminds me to wash my hands when I am done playing in the sand and water table.



While I am at school I wash my hands a lot. My teacher tells me that washing my hands helps keep my healthy. It makes my teacher happy when I remember to wash my hands.